



Ecosystem services and urban heat riskscape moderation: Water, green spaces, and social inequality in Phoenix, USA

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Year: 2011
Journal: Ecological Applications : A Publication of The Ecological Society of America. 21 (7): 2637-2651

Abstract:

Urban ecosystems are subjected to high temperatures--extreme heat events, chronically hot weather, or both--through interactions between local and global climate processes. Urban vegetation may provide a cooling ecosystem service, although many knowledge gaps exist in the biophysical and social dynamics of using this service to reduce climate extremes. To better understand patterns of urban vegetated cooling, the potential water requirements to supply these services, and differential access to these services between residential neighborhoods, we evaluated three decades (1970-2000) of land surface characteristics and residential segregation by income in the Phoenix, Arizona, USA metropolitan region. We developed an ecosystem service trade-offs approach to assess the urban heat riskscape, defined as the spatial variation in risk exposure and potential human vulnerability to extreme heat. In this region, vegetation provided nearly a 25 degrees C surface cooling compared to bare soil on low-humidity summer days; the magnitude of this service was strongly coupled to air temperature and vapor pressure deficits. To estimate the water loss associated with land-surface cooling, we applied a surface energy balance model. Our initial estimates suggest 2.7 mm/d of water may be used in supplying cooling ecosystem services in the Phoenix region on a summer day. The availability and corresponding resource use requirements of these ecosystem services had a strongly positive relationship with neighborhood income in the year 2000. However, economic stratification in access to services is a recent development: no vegetation-income relationship was observed in 1970, and a clear trend of increasing correlation was evident through 2000. To alleviate neighborhood inequality in risks from extreme heat through increased vegetation and evaporative cooling, large increases in regional water use would be required. Together, these results suggest the need for a systems evaluation of the benefits, costs, spatial structure, and temporal trajectory for the use of ecosystem services to moderate climate extremes. Increasing vegetation is one strategy for moderating regional climate changes in urban areas and simultaneously providing multiple ecosystem services. However, vegetation has economic, water, and social equity implications that vary dramatically across neighborhoods and need to be managed through informed environmental policies.

Source: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41416684> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22073649>

Resource Description

Exposure : ☐

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Food/Water Security, Meteorological Factors, Temperature

Temperature: Extreme Heat

Geographic Feature: 

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Desert, Urban

Geographic Location: 

resource focuses on specific location

United States

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation): 

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Model/Methodology: 

type of model used or methodology development is a focus of resource

Cost/Economic, Other Projection Model/Methodology

Other Projection Model/Methodology: discussion only

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content